



*Southwest Region Planning Commission*  
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**Transportation  
Advisory Committee**

**Transportation Advisory Committee**

Kendall Lane, Chair  
*Keene*

**November 4, 2024  
2:00 p.m.**

Frank Sterling, Vice Chair  
*Jaffrey*

**Southwest Region Planning Commission  
37 Ashuelot Street, Keene, NH**

Susan Ashworth  
*HCS Community Services*

Brian Barden  
*Dublin*

**Agenda**

Sara Carbonneau  
*Winchester*

Michael Kowalczyk  
*Monadnock Region Rail  
Trails Collaborative*

I. Welcome and Introductions

Alfred "Gus" Lerandeau  
*Swanzy*

II. Minutes of October 7, 2024

Leandra MacDonald  
*Peterborough*

III. FY 2027-2036 Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan Scores and Preliminary Ranking of Regional Priority Projects

Cheryl Mayberry  
*Walpole*

IV. Other Matters

Jesse Rounds  
*Keene*

V. Next Meeting: January 6, 2025

Ed Smith  
*Hinsdale*

VI. Adjourn

Ruth Ward  
*Stoddard*

*with*

John Kallfelz  
*NHDOT District 4*

*and*

Lucy St. John  
*NHDOT Bureau of  
Planning & Community  
Assistance*

**Southwest Region Planning Commission**

**Transportation Advisory Committee**

**Minutes**

**October 7, 2024**

**Present:** Kendall Lane, Chair, *City of Keene*; Frank Sterling, Vice Chair, *Town of Jaffrey*; Susan Ashworth, *Home Healthcare, Hospice and Community Services (HCS)*; Sara Carbonneau, *Town of Winchester*; Michael Kowalczyk, *Monadnock Region Rail Trails Collaborative (MRRTC)*; Alfred “Gus” Lerandean, *Town of Swanzey*; Leandra MacDonald, *Town of Peterborough*; Ruth Ward, *Town of Stoddard*; Lucy St. John, *NHDOT Bureau of Planning & Community Assistance (NHDOT)*.

**Staff Members Present:** Todd Horner, *Executive Director*; J. B. Mack, *Assistant Director*; Jack Ahern, *Associate Planner*.

**Guests:** Michael Branley, *Swanzey Town Administrator*; Craig Cashman, *Marlborough Highway, Water & Sewer Department*; Josh Green, *Hinsdale Community Development Coordinator (remote)*; Frank Koczalka, *Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB)*; Kathryn Lynch, *Hinsdale Town Administrator (remote)*; Adam Paquette, *Swanzey Planner*; Brian Ruoff, *Keene Department of Public Works, City Engineer*; Brett Rusnock, *Keene, Department of Public Works, Civil Engineer*; Ellen Smith *Marlborough, Town Administrator*.

**I. Welcome and Introductions**

Chairman Kendall Lane called the meeting to order at 2:01 p.m., welcomed those in attendance, and asked for introductions from attendees.

**II. Minutes of September 9, 2024**

**Motion: To approve the minutes of September 9, 2024 as presented.**

Motion by Kendall Lane, seconded by Alfred “Gus” Lerandean. Approved by unanimous vote.

**III. FY 2027-2036 Ten Year Improvement Plan Scoring Preparation**

J. B. Mack reviewed the FY 2027-2036 Ten Year Transportation Improvement Plan (TYP) project nomination process for the TAC and informed them that there were four proposed projects to consider as regional priority projects. The projects will be scored and ranked by TAC members. He explained that today he has coordinated with project sponsors to deliver short presentations on each project and TAC members could ask questions about the projects.

## **Hinsdale Bicycle/Pedestrian Improvements from Fort Hill Rail Trail to Brattleboro, VT**

J. B. Mack gave a presentation on the Hinsdale Bicycle/Pedestrian Improvements from Fort Hill Rail Trail to Brattleboro, VT project to the TAC. He explained that the purpose of the project was to safely move pedestrians and cyclists from Hinsdale to Brattleboro across the Connecticut River. The project aims to foster economic and recreational opportunities in the area and improve safety. It is anticipated that the project will have a positive environmental impact by allowing for more convenient and safer non-motorized transportation between the two destinations. He explained that it is currently unsafe (using NH Route 119 or the Fort Hill Trestle Bridge) or illegal (using the Fort Hill Trestle Bridge) to get from Hinsdale to Brattleboro without an automobile. Improvements made to the Fort Hill Trestle Bridge or NH Route 119 would foster connections to downtown Brattleboro as well as potential connections to the Whetstone Trail and West River Trail in Brattleboro. Improvements would also foster a safer connection between Brattleboro and Hinsdale Center as well as additional connections along the Ashuelot River Trail all the way up to Keene, NH.

J. B. Mack noted that some preliminary engineering for this project was conducted as part of a UNH capstone project that built-off of engineering firm BETA Group's previous work assessing the feasibility of rehabilitating the Fort Hill Railroad trestle bridge. Some acquisition of rail right-of-way will be required to fulfill the entire scope of the project. A 12-car parking lot of crushed stone is proposed for the vacant land north of A1 Pizza on Route 119 to provide an access point for trail users. A path featuring 400 ft. long switchbacks built with retaining walls will lead from the parking lot down to the trail, maintaining a 5% grade that aligns with Americans with Disabilities Act specifications. Rehabilitation of the section of the Fort Hill Rail Trail within the project area will upgrade the surface material to crushed gravel, widen it to 10 ft., and improve drainage. The bridge includes two truss spans as well as 245 ft. of beam bridge that connects to the Brattleboro side of the river. The deck is 12 ft. wide, consisting of timber construction on rail ties. There is potential space for an overlook area to be included on the trusses.

J. B. Mack stated that this project will prompt an alternatives analysis that will likely assess NH Route 119 for feasibility of bicycle and pedestrian improvements. He showed the TAC the challenging topography of the area and the existing narrow shoulders in some parts of NH Route 119 as well as pointing out the planned pedestrian and bicycle enhancements to the Anna Hunt Marsh and Charles Dana truss bridges that will be replaced with a new NH Route 119 bridge.

Leandra MacDonald asked about the current state of the existing Fort Hill Rail Trail and if it connects to a wider trail network and also questioned the need for a parking lot and trailhead. J. B. Mack explained that on the NH side, the Fort Hill Rail Trail already connects to the Ashuelot Rail Trail which runs north to Keene. On the Vermont side, the Town of Brattleboro and others aspire to connect the Fort Hill Rail Trail to the existing Whetstone Trail and West River Trail, however, improvements will be needed in Vermont to facilitate access that doesn't necessitate use of local sidewalks and streets. He also clarified that there is no public access point to the Fort Hill Rail Trail in that section of Town and a trail head and parking area would create an opportunity for a walking/biking loop in the area. Leandra MacDonald asked if the truss bridge has been inspected for conditions and its feasibility of supporting bicycle and pedestrian activities. J. B. stated that a visual inspection had been conducted as part of the UNH capstone project, but that further engineering would be needed before the project moved forward.

Todd Horner provided the TAC with some context pertaining to the project area. He stated that there are several plots of land in the vicinity that are being considered for development that would benefit from the added accessibility and recreational opportunities.

Kendall Lane asked if Brattleboro has had discussions about expanding the trail on their side of the bridge. J. B. Mack explained that they are interested in the improved connectivity the project will offer and have some plans in the works, however, part of their plan will likely involve negotiating with the New England Central Railroad and the Barrows Oil Company.

Leandra MacDonald asked who currently owns the right-of-way associated with this rail trail. J. B. explained that it is owned by NHDOT, the trail is managed by the NH Bureau of Trails. The bridge is currently not being maintained since rail is no longer active.

### **Keene NH Route 12 & NH Route 32 Intersection Improvements**

Brett Rusnock and Brian Ruoff of the City of Keene presented on the proposed project at the intersection of NH Route 12 and NH Route 32 just north of the town border with Swanzey. They explained that the intersection is not compliant with AASHTO sight distance standards and queues of traffic at the stop sign on NH Route 32 entering Route 12 are common during peak hours. Brett Rusnock explained that the project is primarily addressing safety issues for motor vehicles turning off NH Route 32 onto NH Route 12. A crash analysis found above average incidence of motor vehicle accidents at this location. NH Route 32 is the official route for oversized loads, which is made unsafe by this intersection's design. Recent public outreach for the City's Safe Routes for All Roadway Safety Plan included citizen requests to address this intersection's safety issues. The City of Keene's Complete Streets policy will mandate that they include improvements for non-motorized road users. These improvements will include reconstructing the sidewalk and installing a crosswalk.

Brett Rusnock informed the TAC that there are two potential designs being considered for improving the intersection. The first would alter the roadway geometry so NH Route 32 would meet NH Route 12 at a 90-degree angle, forming a T shaped intersection that would include traffic lights. The other option is to install a roundabout. Abutting parcels on the north side of Route 12 are owned by the State of New Hampshire so right-of-way expenses for that part of the redesign will not involve costs, however, two private parcels on either side of NH Route 32 would be affected. Although safety is the main focus of the proposal, the project could potentially open up more parcels for development in this area.

Gus Lerandean asked about using eminent domain to obtain the property and house located immediately south of the project area. Brett Rusnock explained that the City of Keene seeks to avoid using eminent domain unless absolutely necessary, as it is politically unpopular.

Mike Kowalczyk inquired about how much sidewalk north of the project area would be improved, as there was recent work done on the sidewalk along NH Route 12. He asked if the City's plan would leave a length of sidewalk between the two areas unimproved. Brett Rusnock stated that the City would likely take the opportunity to improve the entire section of sidewalk and would use their own funds to do so. Mike then asked if an analysis had been conducted on NH Route 12 traffic if signalized traffic lights are warranted.

Brett responded that none had been done yet. Brian Ruoff indicated that the costs of the two proposals are very similar.

Leandra MacDonald asked if any driveways in the project area would be entering the roundabout if that option were to be pursued. Brett Rusnock responded that it is not best practice to have private driveways directly entering traffic circles, and if necessary they would likely combine plots to provide a shared entry route to any affected properties.

### **Pedestrian Improvements in North Swanzey**

Frank Koczalka presented the proposal for the Town of Swanzey to the TAC noting that the project area intersects with Keene's proposal. The project would improve pedestrian infrastructure in North Swanzey by expanding the current sidewalk network. The proposed sidewalk would extend from the border with the City of Keene down NH Route 12, through the traffic circle, and terminate at the Cheshire Fairgrounds. A crosswalk and Rectangular Rapid Flashing Beacon (RRFB) is proposed to connect the sidewalk on NH Route 12 to the Cheshire Rail Trail in the vicinity of Mount Huggins Drive. A sidewalk would also be installed mostly along the western side of NH Route 32 heading south from the border with Keene. It would include improved closed drainage and rapid flashing beacons at the Lake Street intersection and at Wilson Pond. This sidewalk section would terminate at the intersection with Safford Lane. A third segment of sidewalk on Lake Street would link the previous two, forming an "A" shape and providing necessary connectivity. The proposed sidewalks would be raised with granite curbing. The project would also include straightening the intersection of Lake Street with NH Route 32 into a 90-degree angle to calm traffic. The intersection is currently Y-shaped. To accommodate bicyclists, VHB suggested installing sharrows.

Michael Branley spoke on the project's need and impact. He stated that there is a 220-unit development planned for the corner of Lake Street and NH Route 32 that would directly benefit from the expanded pedestrian infrastructure. There are also multiple other housing developments in various stages of completion within the project area. He explained that the top priority is the northernmost areas of NH Route 12 and NH Route 32 down to Lake Street, as most development is occurring in that area. If funding allows, they will complete the entire proposed length of sidewalks.

Brett Rusnock said that if SWRPC would allow, the City of Keene would update its proposal to show sidewalk connectivity on NH Route 32 to the proposed Swanzey sidewalk that was discussed in the prior project presentation. J. B. Mack indicated that if the new information could be submitted by October 17<sup>th</sup>, he would include it among the scoring materials distributed to the TAC.

### **Marlborough Improvements to NH Route 124 from NH Route 101 to Town Highway Garage**

Frank Koczalka presented the project for the Town of Marlborough to the TAC. It consists of improvements to the intersection of NH Route 124 and NH Route 101 as well as improvements to NH Route 124 extending to the Town Highway Garage. The intersection of NH Route 124 and NH Route 101 is historically the location of many accidents. A traffic volume analysis concluded that the traffic levels here warrant the inclusion of a traffic signal as well as dedicated turning lanes on NH Route 101. This is being considered as part of the project proposal.

Frank Koczalka further explained that the drainage on NH Route 124 regularly backs up and floods during storm events due to inadequate capacity of the stormwater system. The current system consists of a 100+ year old granite sluiceway and other underground drainage structures that have been failing. This results in erosion and property damage to infrastructure and private housing along the roadway. Frank Koczalka stated that the topography of the area and design of Route 124 channel water to the eastern side of the road, which results in flooding. The project would replace and upgrade the drainage system to remedy these issues.

Frank Koczalka reported that the project would also include sidewalk improvements on NH Route 124. Sidewalks would be upgraded to concrete with granite curbing and would extend south to Laurel Street and the Frost Free Library. A new crosswalk would be installed connecting to the library with an RRFB. An additional RRFB would be installed at an existing crosswalk at the intersection of NH Route 124 and Pleasant Street.

Ellen Smith emphasized that the storm water drainage issue is the primary concern of Marlborough. Two 100-year storms in 2021 backed up the entire system and severely flooded the roadway. She indicated that the area is the low-point of a 700 acre watershed, so it is anticipated that flood events and property damage will continue to occur if the drainage system is not replaced.

#### **Discussion About Initial Project Scoring**

J. B. Mack reviewed the NHDOT guidance for scoring Ten Year Plan project proposals for the TAC. He mentioned that in addition to scoring the four new projects, the TAC should conduct a review of projects currently in the TYP to confirm they still have appropriate levels of support. He noted the top ranked project(s) added to the plan are pushed to the back of the lineup, so any of the currently proposed projects wouldn't be constructed until 2036 and 2037. He stated that the Southwest Region had an allocation of approximately \$5 million and that all projects must receive an engineering review to be considered by NHDOT. He reminded the TAC that the evaluation criteria are weighed differently, with safety and economic development having the most weight. There are a total of 8 criterion under 2 categories, need and impact. The TAC will need to narrow down the list of proposals to three projects by November when they will be submitted to NHDOT, who will reply by February with any feedback on project feasibility and cost estimates. He further explained that any TAC member can score projects, but conflicts of interest must be avoided. To that end, TAC members must refrain from scoring projects in the town they represent. Kendall Lane agreed not to score the Keene project, Gus Lerandeau agreed not to score the Swanzey project, and it was noted that Ed "Smokey" Smith should not score the Hinsdale project.

J. B. Mack informed the TAC that SWRPC plans to share a packet of information with them by October 17<sup>th</sup> and would like project scores to be returned by October 31<sup>st</sup>.

#### **IV. Other Matters**

No other matters were brought before the TAC at this time.

**V. Next Meeting: November 4, 2024**

J.B. Mack announced that the next TAC meeting will be held on November 4, 2024.

**VI. Adjourn**

Chairman Kendall Lane adjourned the meeting at 3:34 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jack Ahern  
Associate Planner